

'Twas a Day To Be Remembered in Provo, When . . .

Heber Train, Interurban Collided at Center and 200 West

By
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The train wreck at Center Street and Second West in Provo Oct. 4, 1918 wasn't massive from the standpoint of damage: only three cars were derailed.

Nobody was killed and only 14 persons were injured enough to have their names listed in newspaper accounts.

Yet the accident was historic, in a way. How often do two trains collide right in the heart of the business district?

It occurred nearly 54 years

ago, just a month and a week before the World War I armistice. The principals were the Salt Lake & Utah Railroad, whose electric interurban formerly operated between Payson and Salt Lake City, and the Heber Branch train of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad.

Both of these trains have now gone the way of scores of other rail lines in Utah that have bloomed, faded, and ceased operations during the past century.

The Salt Lake & Utah Railroad, nicknamed the "Orem" after W. C. Orem, the engineer hired to build the line, closed down Feb. 26, 1946 after more than three decades of operation. The Heber Branch of the Rio Grande has now given up the ghost also, and its trackage through Provo pulled out to facilitate widening Second West Street.

(The D&RGW itself, of course, continues as one of the well-known railroads in the West and Midwest. And the "Heber

Creeper" still lives in reincarnation as an excursion train operated from Heber to the Bridal Veil Falls area in Provo Canyon by a group headquartered in Wasatch County.)

Old-timers of Provo still talk about the collision at Second West and Center — and circulation of some fine pictures taken that day by an enterprising Provo photographer helps to keep the memory alive.

The pictures — part of an early-day photo legacy left by Samuel B. Robinson, are now the

possession of Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Adamson of Provo.

Mr. Robinson was a partner with Samuel Jepperson in the Provo Photo Supply at about 75 N. University Ave. in that era. His daughter Bernice (Mrs. Adamson) inherited her father's pictures. These have been loaned for others to copy and a number are now in existence.

Many older Provoans seeing the photos, readily recall the wreck. But remembering the date or even the year was quite

another thing, this writer found, with guesses ranging from 1915 to 1933 by persons interviewed.

Fred Nelson of 779 N. 750 W. provided the clue that enabled us to locate the accounts of the collision in newspaper files. He remembered that as passengers on the interurban carrier, he and his father and brother were bound for Salt Lake to the state fair the day of the accident. He correctly remembered that he was about 12 or 13 years old at the time.

The wreck was bannered Oct. 4, 1918 on Page 1 of the old Provo Post (which merged with the Herald in 1924). The Salt Lake papers gave it good play. Files of the Herald are missing for that period.

Its passenger list swollen that morning because of both the state fair and LDS general conference, the four-car Orem pulled out of the Provo station at First West and Center (where the J. C. Penney store is now

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REMEMBER THIS SCENE? Engine of Heber passenger-freight train of Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad smacked the fourth passenger coach of a four-car Salt Lake & Utah Railroad Interurban train at the intersection of Center Street and Second West in Provo Oct. 4, 1918. The impact derailed the engine and its tender of the Rio

Grande train and the passenger car of the Interurban. More than 14 persons were injured, none seriously. Note boys in knee pants in foreground, horse-drawn vehicle at right, and early-day automobile over top of interurban. Home in background was located where Lerner's store now stands and belonged to George Taylor, early-day businessman.



SHATTERED WINDOWS and other evidences of the force of the West Center train wreck of 1918 are evident in this photo. News accounts said that the "Orem" electric interurban, with a big passenger list headed for LDS General Con-

ference and the state fair, went on to Salt Lake after disconnecting the wrecked coach. These photos, copies of the ones owned by Mr. and Mrs. A. W. Adamson, were loaned to the Herald by Leo Taylor.

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located) at 8:45, westbound for Salt Lake City.

Meantime, the Heber Branch of the Rio Grande was southbound, approaching Center. Business buildings on the north side of Center obstructed each train's view of the other.

The Provo Post (undoubtedly the article was written by editor H. C. Hicks, one of the interurban's passengers who was slightly injured in the collision) reported the impact occurred "with a tremendous crash" that "terrified" the passengers.

The Orem train was driven by Motorman Shelladay under direction of Conductor Spears. Harry Sharp of Provo was engineer and T.S. Semister conductor of the Heber train which consisted of four freight and two passenger cars. The passenger coaches were at the rear of the train and occupants were not injured.

Said the Post: As the Orem approached the Second West tracks, the motorman realized he couldn't get past the crossing unless the Heber train could stop, so he turned on the power. Three of the interurban's coaches cleared the track but the fourth was hit near the front steps by the steam engine of the Heber train.

The Orem coach was derailed and damaged badly; the Heber train's engine and tender also were derailed. Damage to the steam train was light. The Salt Lake & Utah Railroad coach incurred the brunt of the

damage.

The injury list, all passengers on the Orem, included some of the area's best-known people. Albert Mabey, later bishop of the Fifth Ward, was most seriously injured, with wrist and head cuts and bruises. Others listed as injured by one newspaper or another included:

Mayor LeRoy Dixon, Schools Superintendent L. E. Eggertsen, E. D. Jones, and Editor Hicks of Provo; Mr. and Mrs. Charles Cloward, Charles Reynolds and J. A. Loveless of Payson; Heber Timothy of Roosevelt, and Mrs. M. J. Finley, Mrs. Charles Evans, and Mr. and Mrs. Boyer of Springville.

Physicians treated the injured at the Provo General Hospital, in the Sutton-Chase Drug Store near the scene, and the office of Dr. Walter T. Hasler. In some cases the injuries were superficial; hospitalization was required for only one or two persons — and this was brief.

The Post commented that fortunately the coach of the Orem train "was the modern steel type which protected the passengers."

That's about the story, except for the discussion on whose fault the accident was. Newspaper comments seemed to disagree on this and we found no official report of the investigation.

There were a couple of small additional items:

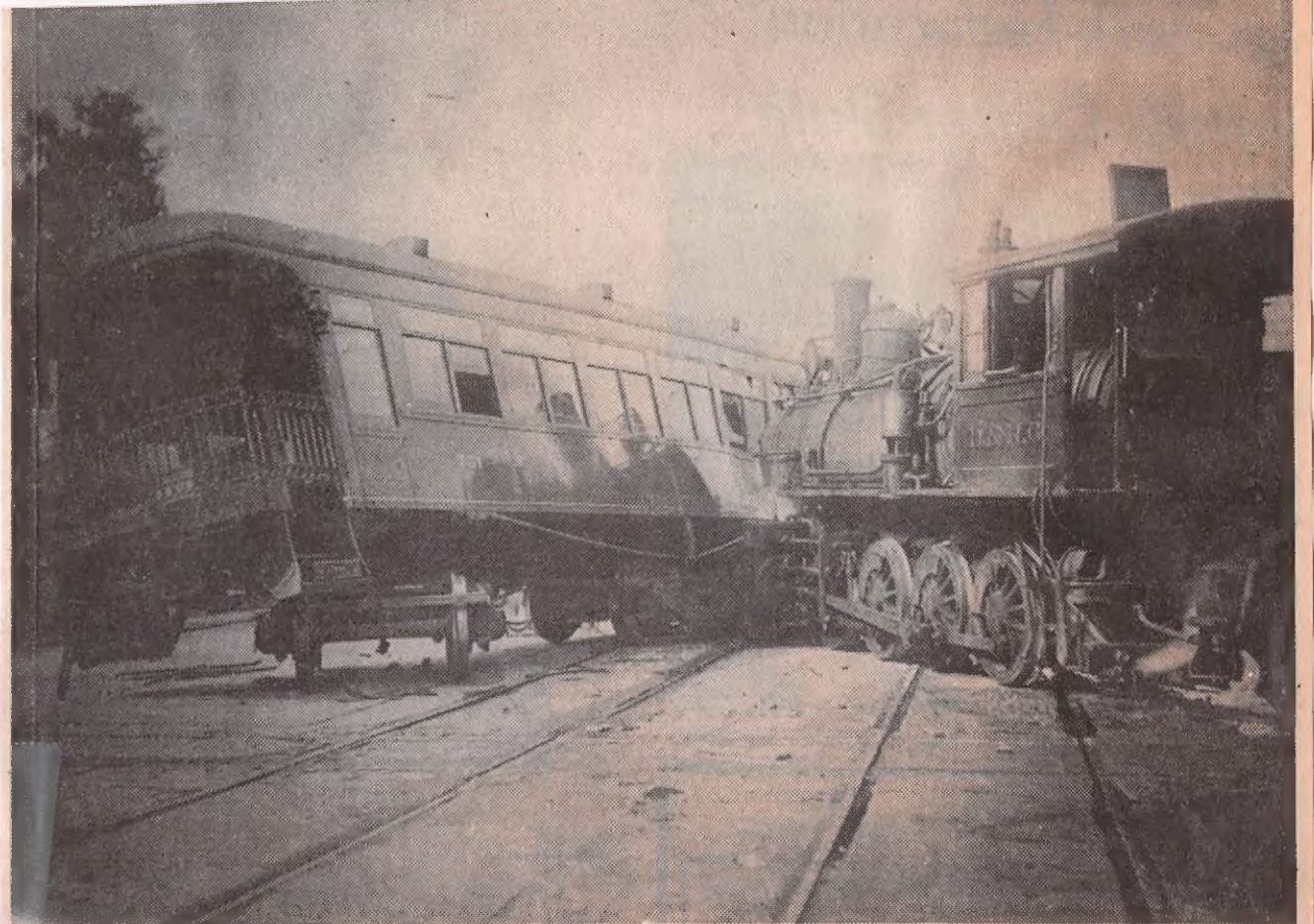
— Mr. Nelson remembered that the sheriff was aboard the Orem train, taking two prisoners to the state penitentiary. The

prisoners were handcuffed together and went sprawling down the isle when the impact of the wreck occurred.

— The passengers who went on to Salt Lake had a nice time despite the morning's harrowing experience. Those who attended

conference were especially pleased because Joseph F. Smith, the church's sixth president, was there to speak after a severe illness. And state fair attendees were happy because Utah County walked off with sweepstakes honors.

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THIS VIEW of collision nearly 50 years ago between Rio Grande freight-passenger train and Salt Lake & Utah Railroad (commonly called the "Orem") shows the fourth car of the interurban balanced precariously on its wheels after impact — and both vehicles off the tracks. All three photos on this page are believed to have been taken by

Samuel B. Robinson, partner in the Provo Photo Supply Company with Samuel Jepperson at that time. These and other historic photos of the period are now in possession of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur W. Adamson. Mrs. Adamson is Mr. Robinson's daughter. Date of collision was only a month before the end of World War I.